

I have been moved by the outpouring of respect, compassion, and love for those who lost loved ones in Tucson last Saturday and for those who are recovering from their physical and psychological wounds. I also recognize those who responded to the attacks, staff members quietly going about making democracy work, bystanders, medical responders and surgeons - ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

My [thoughts and prayers](#) remain with my friend and colleague Representative Gabrielle Giffords and her husband, Mark Kelly. Gabby is a beautiful person and everything one would want in a congressional representative – thoughtful, engaged, compassionate, optimistic and a genuinely good person.

If you would like to send well wishes to Representative Giffords, her family, or the victims and their families, you can email giffordswellwishes@gmail.com.

This tragedy hits us on more than a personal level. The Tucson shooting strikes a blow to our ability to govern ourselves, to maintain a peaceful society. The rights to assembly peaceably and to speak freely are preserved not just for their own sake, but, as the geniuses who established this country recognized, it is through those rights that we can create a society that protects and extends life, liberty, and happiness.

There are lessons to be drawn from the events about our understanding of people with mental illness and their screening and treatment. There are lessons to be drawn about our gun crazy culture. There are lessons to be drawn about the ever-present inflammatory, dehumanizing rhetoric, but we should defer those discussions for the moment and recognize that we are a strong, prosperous, and supportive country because of our representative democracy and our freedom to assemble and speak.

Talking with Each Other

One part of this tragedy that is so heartbreaking is that Representative Giffords was doing what she does best – listening to constituents and understanding their concerns. Rather than withdraw, as some have suggested, members of Congress should do more outreach, hold more public meetings, and attend more community events.

That's what I've been doing this week, talking with students at two Central New Jersey schools, meeting with seniors in Franklin Township in Somerset County and Princeton Borough, and honoring local [Catholic Charities](#) officials for their good work. Monday night I hosted a telephone town hall for more than 1,300 Central New Jersey residents. You can listen to the entire town hall here (may take time to load).

Please contact me, through my aide Dana Mangan (1-87-RUSH-HOLT or dana.mangan@mail.house.gov), if you

would like me to visit a school or attend an event in your community.